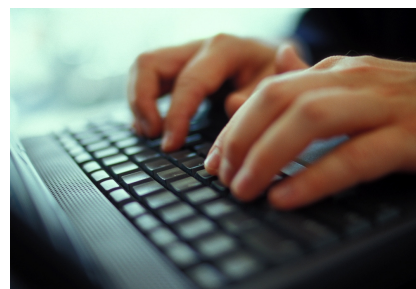
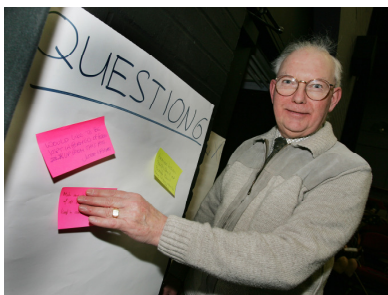


Consultation and Engagement Strategy



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Section I - Introduction

- 1.1 Chelmsford City Council has always been committed to listening to local people in shaping their area and the services that they receive. The Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy and accompanying internal Toolkit were first launched in 2007. The Strategy outlined our long-term approach to involving residents in a consistent and coordinated way; using corporate standards, innovative approaches and best practice.
- 1.2 Over the next few years we are facing an unprecedented period of change, with spending on public services being significantly reduced. These challenges mean that it has become even more important to work together with the local people, including 'hard to reach' communities, to ensure that we make the most of the available opportunities and continue to improve service provision.
- 1.3 Since the launch of the strategy, the Council has undertaken a large number of statutory and non-statutory consultations, including various annual resident satisfaction surveys, questionnaires to understand crime concerns, consultations on planning developments and a Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places. We have established new ways of working, such as developing our Citizens' Panel, setting up a Parish Charter, running more focus groups and exhibitions in places more accessible to the general public, and going directly into the communities to seek residents' views.
- 1.4 We have worked hard to further improve access to information and services. For example, our Customer Service Centre not only enables customers to deal with multiple enquiries in one place, but also offers a chance to speak to representatives from a number of different partner agencies present there on an ongoing basis. The free Mobile Customer Information Service has now been extended to cover ten rural venues around the Chelmsford area, to ensure that some of the most isolated or vulnerable communities, such as the elderly, young families and those with mobility requirements have access to information and advice about local services. The Council has also expanded its use of the Internet to offer more information and online services, allowing residents to make various payments and applications, report any problems or book tickets for upcoming shows and events.
- 1.5 The Council is committed to continue using the existing methods of consultation and engagement and to investigate new and innovative ways of reaching people, such as social media and smart phones. Through the involvement of residents, visitors, students, businesses and local organisations, we can ensure we offer responsive services that make Chelmsford an even better place to live, work and visit.

Section 2 - Purpose of the Strategy

- 2.1 The Consultation and Engagement Strategy builds on and consolidates the existing approaches, corporate framework and expertise that we have developed over the years to facilitate a consistent two-way conversation with the public.
- 2.2 The Strategy helps to further increase the opportunities for residents to have their say about their needs and learn about the decision-making process, whilst ensuring that consultation and engagement activities are inclusive, easy to access and a worthwhile experience for all. It is supported by a detailed, internal Toolkit, which offers practical advice, templates and useful information for officers carrying out consultation activities.
- 2.3 This document sets out our strategic long-term aims and objectives together with the principles that we will use when dealing with the public. These will be complemented by more specific aims and objectives at service level that will be relevant to individual consultation and engagement activities. It also includes an explanation on how the Strategy will be delivered over the coming years and how we will reduce the likelihood of consultation fatigue through avoiding duplication and encouraging services to share information already gathered on customers' and communities' views and attitudes.
- 2.4 The Strategy complies with all the current legislation and is also in line with the Government's 'Big Society' and Localism agenda, both of which highlight the need for public involvement in shaping local services.
- 2.5 The Council has also adopted a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) setting out specifically how it will involve and consult local people in planning and development issues affecting the Chelmsford area. The SCI is a requirement of national planning legislation and complements this strategy. It is available to view on our website.

Section 3 - Aims and Objectives

3.1 Chelmsford City Council strives to put the needs of all our customers at the heart of our work at all times. Through carrying out consultation and engagement activities, we aim to:

- promote mutual trust between the Council and residents
- widen the opportunities for local people and groups to gain an understanding of our policies, priorities and the decision-making process
- encourage residents, businesses, visitors, customers, partners and other relevant stakeholders to get involved and influence how services are delivered in Chelmsford
- gain information about the needs of residents to allow us to continue providing the best quality, accessible and responsive services possible

3.2 For these strategic aims to be achieved, the organisational processes and individual activities supporting consultation and engagement must be efficiently managed to:

- ensure that consultation and engagement exercises reach out to all residents, including those from different diversity strands, and in particular to those groups within the city that can be difficult to engage with, such as those living in rural areas, commuters or young people
- make consultation and engagement activities a positive and rewarding experience for residents through the use of new technologies and innovative ways of working
- improve partnership working through engaging with the voluntary sector and other stakeholders
- support good practice, high standards and continuous improvement across the Council to avoid duplication and provide better value for money
- ensure the results from consultation and engagement are used effectively across service areas and feedback is given on how residents' views have been considered

Section 4 - Principles

- 4.1 The following principles are used by the Chelmsford City Council's employees, where relevant, to ensure that we further improve the efficiency of our arrangements.

Accessibility: we will make consultation and engagement activities as accessible as possible in terms of location, time, language, format and support to encourage participation from the widest range of residents. We will comply with our legal duties under legislation, such as the Equality Act 2010.

Appropriate Process: we will use the most appropriate method to consult and engage to make the experience interesting, relevant and worthwhile for participants.

Coordination: we will plan our consultation and engagement activities, pool resources and work jointly whenever possible to avoid 'consultation fatigue'. Where relevant, we will use previously obtained information to reduce duplication of engagement activity.

Evaluation: we will actively ask for feedback to be able to evaluate satisfaction with consultation and engagement activities and continue to improve them in the future.

Feedback: we will communicate final decisions back to participants and the broader public, with a description of how the public views and suggestions were considered and used. This will be done through our website, newsletters and other appropriate communication channels.

Information: whenever possible, we will provide information in advance to enable informed participation, using clear and concise language and avoiding jargon.

Innovation: we will continue to update our methods of consultation and engagement to make them relevant to the audience, e.g. by using new technology.

Participation: we will actively encourage involvement from all residents within the Chelmsford area, including those from traditionally 'hard-to-reach' groups so that everyone has a chance to represent their viewpoints on issues relevant to them.

Partnership Working: we will continue to work together across Council service areas and with our partner agencies.

Quality: we will carry out consultation and engagement activities to the highest possible standard and will use feedback to continue to improve the process.

Relevance: we will only consult and engage with residents when their involvement can influence the areas in question. This will be done in good time to inform the decision-making process.

Transparency: we will be clear about the reasons for consultation and engagement and how we intend to use the results in the decision-making process.

Appendix I Understanding consultation and engagement

I. Understanding Consultation and Engagement

- I.1 There is an important difference between informing, consulting and engaging with local people. Each involves different approaches, tools and techniques, aimed at different outcomes. Using the right method is essential to ensure that consultation and engagement is effective, achieves the intended results and is a positive experience.

Informing

- I.2 Providing information is a one-way process of notifying people about local services, initiatives and issues. It is the primary mechanism for alerting people to what is available and happening in their area, as well as allowing the Council to comment on the progress of its initiatives. The value of providing information should not be underestimated. When asked, people regularly identify a need for more information about services in their area, with one of the most popular publications often being a Council's A – Z of services.
- I.3 Examples of information include press releases, the Council's website, leaflets, posters, exhibitions, articles in newspapers, television and radio interviews and online communication.

Consultation

- I.4 Consultation can be explained simply as a: “process of dialogue that leads to a decision” (The Audit Commission, 1999 ‘Listen up’). It is a primary way of ensuring that all Council services respond to and reflect the needs of local people. Consultation can be statutory (e.g. the Council is required by law to consult on planning issues) or non-statutory (e.g. the Council actively chooses to seek views on relevant topics, such as focus groups on older people's needs). The organisation recognises the value of consulting, as it allows the Council to gain views from local people or service users about proposed changes, priorities or new initiatives. Although these views are considered, the final decision rests with the Council.
- I.5 Consultation is more than just providing information, but less than participating in making decisions or plans. People comment on the given options, rather than propose any alternatives. This can sometimes lead to confusion; with people feeling the Council has taken the decision, despite local views. Therefore, it is crucial to be very clear at the outset about what people are being asked to comment on and an explanation of how decisions will be reached to minimise the possibility of misunderstanding. It is also key to remember that if the decision has already been taken, there is no point in consulting the public. The Council may need to inform about the situation and explain what has been decided and why.
- I.6 Consultation can take many forms, depending on its purpose. It may be carried out as a research exercise (this is sometimes considered as a distinct activity from consultation).

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Research involves gathering new facts, or measuring the views of a given group of people, to evaluate issues and trends. Examples include market research, public enquiries or attitude surveys. The Council can also consult by sending out questionnaires, asking people for opinions about proposed developments, or by organising focus groups.

- 1.7 It should be remembered that different types of activities might overlap. For example, there can be a focus group that discusses already prepared plans (i.e. people are consulted on whether they like them or not). However, there can also be a focus group that participates in designing proposals (engagement).

Engagement

- 1.8 Community engagement is a two-way process. It involves residents in making decisions that can lead to improvements in the quality of their life and allow them to take part in shaping the places they live in.
- 1.9 Engagement requires much more active involvement from residents than consultation. Rather than comment on given options and plans, local people work together with the Council to come to a decision. They are able to gain greater knowledge of the relevant issues, discuss different options and contribute ideas. Residents can also suggest some solutions for tackling problems faced by the community, such as crime, or developing responsive services.
- 1.10 There is an emphasis on building relationships with the local community, so that the participants remain involved on an ongoing basis. Community engagement activities provide a practical way of advancing democratic renewal, through a process of developing strong, active, and empowered communities.
- 1.11 Local people need clear messages about what services can be influenced and precisely what levels of the decision-making process are open to them. If this is not made clear from the outset many of those engaged may become disillusioned and disengage from further involvement. Therefore, every participation exercise has to make it clear at which level it aims to involve the public.
- 1.12 To undertake successful engagement with local people and communities, services must recognise:
- most people will engage regarding those services that most directly affect them
 - local people can, and do, make a valuable contribution to improving their local neighbourhoods and communities

Appendix I Understanding consultation and engagement

I.13 It is important to make engagement as inclusive as possible. A number of methods and approaches can be taken to facilitate participation of excluded groups. These include:

- making sure that there are clear messages about why and how we are engaging to give people options about how they can be involved
- designing engagement around the profile, needs and lifestyles of excluded groups, e.g. homeless people, travellers, etc.
- making it open and accessible
- involving local partners who may have more in-depth knowledge and contact with excluded groups, e.g. Chelmsford Council for Voluntary Service , etc.

Levels of Participation

I.14 The table below gives examples from Chelmsford City Council, within each of the three levels of participation.

Level of Participation	Examples
Information A one-way process of providing relevant information to local people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chelmsford City Council website• press releases• leaflets and posters• 'Life' newspaper• Information events, e.g. for Parish councillors• Older Persons' Information Days• Exhibitions and Forums
Consultation Inviting people to have their say before the Council makes the decision.	<p>Providing feedback on decisions, services and policies, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Have Your Say' section on Chelmsford City Council's website• 'Comments, Compliments and Complaints' feedback forms <p>Research based activities (to better understand resident/user needs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Satisfaction surveys, e.g. Customer Access Survey• Various online, telephone and postal surveys• Focus group for older people• Various consultations with Citizens' Panel

Appendix I Understanding consultation and engagement

Level of Participation	Examples
	<p>Consultation (to get resident / user views on options and priorities), e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation on proposed changes to regulations for Chelmsford Cemetery and Crematorium • Website testing exercise • Consultation on executive arrangements – ‘Who should run Chelmsford City Council?’ • Consultations on different aspects of the Local Development Framework (LDF), including Village Design Statements and Development Plan Documents. • Have you Say on Council Tax Customer Service
<p>Engagement</p> <p>Engagement with local residents can be realised through a number of activities</p>	<p>Influencing decisions, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking Citizens’ Panel to take part in an interactive exercise to choose the key priority areas within the Council’s budget • Signing a hard copy petition or e-petition to the Council to proactively let us know concerns about a certain cause or issue. <p>Co-design / work with the authority to design policies and services, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scouts’ Involvement with the development of One World Garden at Hylands House <p>Co-produce / carry out some aspects of services for themselves, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEAT initiatives in Chelmsford, e.g. river clean • Parishes running some of the park areas

